

VZCZCXRO9795
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #1807 1671606
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 151606Z JUN 08
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7814
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 001807

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/15/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: SADRISTS SPURN ELECTIONS - OR DO THEY?

Classified By: Political Counselor Matt Tueller. Reasons 1.4(b,d).

¶1. (U) The press is reporting June 14 comments by senior Sadrist Trend officials announcing that the movement will not take part in provincial elections expected before the end of the year. Seeking to reinforce the notion of the Sadr Trend as pure guardians of Iraqi sovereignty, Salah al-Obeidi, one of Moqtada's top aides and spokesman, said "Sayyid Moqtada does not believe in elections or in the coming provincial governments as long as the occupation forces are here." Similarly, Liwa Smeisan, head of the Sadrist Trend's Political Committee, added "We don't want anybody to blame us or consider us part of this government while it is allowing the country to be under occupation."

¶2. (C) Comment: While an attention grabber, there is almost certainly less to the Sadrist Trend statements than the headlines would suggest. Most politically savvy Iraqis, including President Talabani and Vice President Abdel Mehdi, firmly believe that the Sadrists will indeed participate in the elections - but as "independents" or as members of other lists (including, perhaps, Ibrahim Jafari's alleged new coalition of opposition parties). This psuedo-boycott of the elections, coupled with Sadr's June 13 statement announcing the formation of a special wing of the JAM to fight foreign (i.e. Coalition) forces exclusively, seems designed to preserve the myth of the Trend's ideological purity (i.e., the Trend will not sully itself by associating itself with the "occupation") and perhaps to cushion an unfavorable outcome at the ballot box (i.e., "we did not lose because we did not run"). Moreover, by posing as independents the Sadrists no doubt hope to cash in on public disillusionment with Iraq's current political parties. Finally, by portraying themselves as independents or members of other lists, the Sadrists intend to circumvent the ban on parties with militia wings from participating in the election.
BUTENIS